

Implementing the National Organic Program (NOP)

April 25, 2002

Clopyralid update

Clopyralid is a long-lasting herbicide used to control broadleaf weeds. It passes through animals and the composting process with little breakdown. The fact that it doesn't break down presents a problem for compost and manure. Compost contaminated with clopyralid may harm certain types of broadleaf plants such as beans, peas, sunflowers, peppers, tomatoes and potatoes.

Information included in the 2002 application packets stated that compost contaminated with clopyralid would be prohibited from use on organic farms. Sampling conducted over the last few months has indicated that the majority of compost and manure has measurable amounts of clopyralid. The zero tolerance on clopyralid contamination has led to extremely limited sources of compost and manure that meet organic standards even though for many crops clopyralid contaminated compost and manure has no detrimental effect on the plants or soil.

The WSDA Organic Advisory Board met on April 18 in Ellensburg to discuss the clopyralid zero tolerance standard. The board approved the following recommendation that the WSDA Organic Food Program will adopt for the 2002 cropping season:

1. Compost and manure that receives WSDA approval through the Brand Name Material Registration process must be clopyralid-free. Bioassays and analytical testing will be required to ensure that compost or manure approved through the Brand Name Material Registration process are free of clopyralid residues. Currently there are a few products with verification that they have clopyralid free compost. See the WSDA Brand Name Material List.
2. For the 2002 cropping season, organic producers may use compost and manure from any source as long as the ingredients (feedstocks) are approved for organic use. Both analytical testing and bioassays of compost and manure are encouraged. Sensitive plants (legumes, composites, nightshades) may be damaged by clopyralid contaminated compost.

There will be no restrictions on organic growers utilizing compost or manure that is contaminated with clopyralid.

State Legislative changes (RCW changes)

Governor Locke signed House Bill 2397 into law on March 28, 2002. This bill revises the state's organic statute to be compliant with the National Organic Program.

Chapter 16-157 WAC, Organic Food Standards and Certification

Organic Food Standards and Certification, chapter 16-157 WAC provides the certification procedures and requirements for producers, processors, and handlers of organic food products. The purpose of the new rule is to adopt the National Organic Program in Washington State in order to continue to provide organic certification to the organic food industry and enable producers, processors and handlers to maintain access to the organic market.

The new rules will be effective at the end of May, 2002.

Manure restrictions and compost requirements

Under the NOP, the producer must not apply raw, aged, or liquid manure within 120 days of harvest of a crop, for human consumption, that has contact with the soil or within 90 days of the harvest of a crop, for human consumption, that does not have contact with the soil surface or soil particles.

In order for a material to be considered composted under the NOP, it must be produced under specific conditions. The NOP requires that the composting process must start with a Carbon:Nitrogen (C:N) ratio of between 25:1 and 40:1 and maintain temperatures between 131°F and 170°F for a minimum of three days for static piles and 15 days for windrow systems. A Compost Task Force has made recommendations to the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) that the compost and manure requirements are changed. The recommendations should be posted on the NOP website at <http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/index.htm> within the next few weeks.

Organic commission

A survey was mailed out on April 5 to all organic producers. Results of the survey will be available by mid-June. There is a House Agriculture Committee work session on the organic commission scheduled for May 21 in Wenatchee.

Organic Advisory Board

The WSDA Organic Advisory Board (OAB) was established in 1987 to advise WSDA concerning the implementation of the Organic Food Program. The OAB consists of organic farmers, processors, handlers, and other interested parties that meet to discuss the Organic Food Program and recommend policy to the WSDA Organic Food Program.

The Organic Advisory Board meetings are open to the public. The next meeting is scheduled for June 6, 2002 – 1-5 PM in Seattle. Summer and fall meetings will be scheduled later this year. Please visit the program's website <http://agr.wa.gov/FoodAnimal/Organic/FoodProducers.htm> for updated information concerning the time and locations of Organic Advisory Board meetings.